Use of Reason

IN

PROPOSITIONS

The Evidence whereof depends upon Human Testimony.

By

Anthony Collins Esq

LONDON

Printed in the Year [illegible]

AN

ESSAY

concerning the

Vindication

OF

PROPOSITIONS.

The Evidence whereof depends
upon plain Testimony.

LONDON,

Printed in the Year 1700.

AN ESSAY Concerning the Uſe of Reaſon, &c.

Sect. 1. I AM not ignorant of the various ſignifications of the word *Reaſon* in popular Diſcourſes, but ſhall not confound or perplex my Reader with enumerating them. I ſhall only give him that Idea I deſign by it in the following Diſcourſe. By *Reaſon* I underſtand *that faculty of the Mind whereby it perceives the Truth, Falſhood, Probability or Improbability of Propoſitions.* To render this Definition more perſpicuous, I ſhall conſider the nature of a Propoſition, and the various exerciſe of the Mind, with relation to all kinds of Propoſitions.

1ſt. All Propoſitions whatever conſiſt of Terms or Words which ſtand for Ideas

concerning which ſome agreement is affirm'd or deny'd, as, *that the Whole is equal to all its parts*, or *that ſome of the parts are not equal to the Whole*. *Is* or *is not* are thoſe Terms which ſignify the agreement or diſagreement. Therefore when Truth, Falſhood, Probability or Improbability are applied to Propoſitions, nothing is meant by them but the neceſſary or probable agreement or diſagreement of the Ideas of which the extremes in Propoſitions conſiſt, as will farther appear if we conſider,

2*dly*. The actions of the Mind, with relation to true, falſe, probable or improbable Propoſitions.

(1*ſt*.) There are ſome Ideas join'd in Propoſitions which the Mind perceives to agree or diſagree immediately or intuitively without the uſe of Proof or intermediate Ideas to diſcover that agreement or diſagreement, ſuch as, *Where there is property there may be injuſtice: Where there is no property there is no injuſtice: Two and two are four, two and two are not four*, and a thouſand others of the like kind.

(2*dly*.) There are other Ideas join'd in Propoſitions, which the Mind does not perceive to agree or diſagree without the uſe of Proof or intermediate Ideas, as when I conſider this Propoſition, that *Men are by nature Equal*, or in other Terms

 have

have not excluſively of one another any political Power over one another. Now not being ſatisfied by an immediate view of the Ideas join'd, *Men* and *Equality*, of the truth or falſhood of the Propoſition, I caſt about for intermediate Ideas, which may diſcover the agreement or diſagreement of the Ideas in queſtion. If I cannot find any diſtinguiſhing mark or ſign by a Survey of my own Ideas, or the Word of God, whereby I may diſtinguiſh the Perſon or Perſons particularly intruſted with this Political Power; the connection of the Ideas *Men* and *Equality* is evident, that is, they do agree, as they would diſagree, could I by the ſurvey of my own Ideas find out ſome diſtinguiſhing mark, or that God had in his Word interpos'd in behalf of a particular Perſon and his Family.

(*3dly.*) There are Ideas join'd in Propoſitions, which the Mind perceives to agree or diſagree but probably, as *That there are other Worlds beſides that we inhabit*; or *That an Oak cannot grow up to the ſize, in an hour, which Trees of that kind have in their Perfection.*

(*4thly.*) There are Ideas join'd in Propoſitions, which the Mind perceives to agree or diſagree by the Teſtimony of others; and tho the agreement or diſagreement of ſuch Ideas be but probable, yet

ſuch Propoſitions are very juſtly diſtinguiſhable from thoſe Propoſitions, whoſe probable agreement or diſagreement the mind perceives by intermediate Ideas that are an internal Evidence to diſcover that agreement or diſagreement; whereas Teſtimony is an external Evidence, and the thing teſtified of might be neither the object of Aſſent nor Diſſent but for the ſake of the Teſtimony.

Sect. 2. Upon the Mind's perceiving the agreement or diſagreement of Ideas immediately or by the intervention of Ideas, which have a neceſſary or probable agreement, or by the help of Teſtimony, there follows an Aſſent of the Mind, which is different according to the different nature of the Evidence, whereby the Ideas join'd in a Propoſition ſeem to agree or diſagree. When the agreement or diſagreement is viſible at firſt ſight, or by the help of an intermediate Idea, which has a neceſſary Connexion with the Ideas join'd, our Aſſent is then call'd *Science*. When the agreement or diſagreement by the intervention of intermediate Ideas that internally diſcover the agreement or diſagreement, is but probable, our Aſſent is then call'd *Opinion*: and when we perceive by Teſtimony, our Aſſent is then call'd *Faith*.

Sect.

Sect. 3. From what has been ſaid, it is plain that *Reaſon* does its part in all kind of Propoſitions, and that the Aſſent is proportion'd according to the degree of Evidence that each Propoſition has. I ſhall not be more particular in explaining its uſe, with relation to matters of *Science* or *Opinion*, any farther than is neceſſary to ſet in a clear light its *uſe* in Propoſitions, whoſe Truth depends upon Teſtimony; which will clearly appear by conſidering the nature of Teſtimony, the nature of the things teſtified, their relation to one another, and to the other Objects of the Underſtanding, whether they be matters of *Science* or *Opinion*.

Sect. 4. Teſtimony, or the Witneſs of Men to the Truth of Propoſitions of fact, is a very great foundation of our Knowledg. All our Hiſtory of the riſe and fall of States, all our Journeys for Wealth, pleaſure or improvement of the Mind, all our Experiments upon record in Phyſick and natural Philoſophy, are founded on the Teſtimony of Men. Upon that likewiſe is founded our belief of reveal'd Religion, which can have no other Foundation, unleſs Miracles were every day wrought for its Confirmation before our Eyes, or that every particular man had

once in his Life an immediate Communication from God of all its divine Truths. But for as much as ſingle Men may teſtify a falſhood, and ſeveral Men may agree together to teſtify a falſhood, and in ſome caſes Men may have their ſenſes impos'd on, and be deceiv'd, Teſtimony of it ſelf is not ſufficient to procure Faith or Aſſent, unleſs accompanied with theſe two Circumſtances, credibility of Perſons, and credibility of the Things related.

1*ſt*. By *Credibility of Perſons*, I underſtand Mens having the means of Information, Capacity to underſtand, Honeſty and Diſintereſſedneſs.

2*dly*. By *Credibility of Things* related I underſtand,

(1*ſt*.) That the words made uſe of in the *Relation* ſtand for known Ideas, or Ideas that we are capable of forming; for if they ſtand for Ideas that we know not, or want Faculties to perceive, there are then no objects for the Mind to exert it ſelf upon. Nothing remains but mere Sounds, which without ſignifications are no more to it than the ſounds of a Trumpet, or an Hautboy.

(2*dly*.) The words muſt ſtand for thoſe Ideas which the uſe of Language has appropriated them to, or for what the Author or Relator ſays he underſtands by them,

or

or for what the viſible deſign of the Author or *Relator* determins them to ſignify. Theſe are all the ways of knowing the meaning of Words: and if we cannot find out the meaning of a Man's words by comparing him with himſelf, by the uſe of the Language in which he writes, or by his particular Definitions, it is all one to the Reader or Hearer, as if the words ſtood for Ideas he knew nothing of: for an inability to find out Ideas, ſignify'd by words that we have facultys to perceive, leaves the Mind as much without an Object, as when they ſtand for Ideas which we have not faculties to perceive. Indeed with relation to words ſtanding either for Ideas which we have not Faculties to perceive, or for Ideas that we have Faculties to perceive, without knowing what thoſe Ideas are, a Man is capable of theſe actions of his Mind, of believing that thoſe words ſtand for Ideas, and that the Ideas ſignify'd by them have a relation to one another. As for inſtance, a Man born Blind that hears a large diſcourſe of Colours, of which he has no manner of Ideas, and is incapable of having any, cannot give his Aſſent to any particular Propoſition about them. When he is told that his Face is red or white, he underſtands no more than if he was told his *Face was Couſheda*;

ſheda; unleſs it be this, that from the Integrity of the Perſon he converſes with, he believes ſomething is ſignify'd by that Word, and that that meaning has a relation to his Face. The caſe is juſt the ſame when we hear two *Chineſe* diſcourſe. They uſe ſounds to one another which we underſtand not, and conſequently aſſent not to one word they ſay. And yet we may believe they underſtand one another, and talk truth to one another. Now in performing theſe actions of the Mind, a Man goes not one ſtep beyond his Ideas; for the Propoſition aſſented to ſtands both for known Ideas, and as much is underſtood as could be ſuppos'd to be intended by the Perſon who talk'd to the blind Man of Colours. For the blind Man's Aſſent is confin'd to this; that the words red or white ſtand for a general undetermin'd Idea of ſomething, to which he adds a general undetermin'd Idea of Relation, without any Ideas of the thing or its particular relation. I had not been ſo particular upon this, which viſibly falls in with what I made requiſite in the firſt place to the credibility of a *Relation* or Story, but that the miſapprehenſions about this matter have been the occaſion of a great deal of wrangling in the Controverſy of *Myſterys*.

(3*dly*.) I muſt not only have Ideas to the words, but the Ideas muſt not be repugnant to one another when put into Propoſitions nor to what we *know* to be true by the uſe of our Faculties. By *knowing a thing to be true*, I underſtand *knowing* ſtrictly ſo call'd: for let a Propoſition be ever ſo improbable, if it amounts not to a repugnancy to another Propoſition in the Hiſtorical Relation, or to one which is ſelf-evident, or whoſe Ideas I perceive neceſſarily to agree by the intervention of an intermediate Idea, it may be receiv'd as a Truth from a credible Author. That an Oak ſhould grow up to the ſize and ſtature of a Tree of that kind in its perfection in leſs than an hour, tho very improbable, is as poſſible as that it ſhould do ſo in an hundred and fifty Years, and conſequently as free from Contradiction; for all Growth is by the addition of new Particles, which by a briſker motion than ordinary muſt produce as great a Bulk in a little time, as a ſlower motion in a longer time. In a word, when the Perſon or Perſons are credible, all difficulties whatever as to the thing teſtify'd that come ſhort of a Contradiction of one part of the *Relation* to another part of it, or to what we know otherwiſe to be true, hinder not the thing related from being credible, and conſequently

quently hinder it not from becoming the object of our Faith or Aſſent.

1. Becauſe this would put an Impoſſibility on Men. Men can only ſay they believe Contradictions but cannot believe them. To affirm and deny the ſame thing at the ſame time, ſuppoſes belief and disbelief at the ſame time, which cannot be. To ſay we believe the Whole is equal to all its Parts, and to ſay we believe the Whole is not equal to all its Parts, is to ſay Nothing, and conſequently to believe or disbelieve Nothing, the Aſſent or Diſſent being limited to nothing particular.

2. I ask if there is any *Criterion* of Truth whereby we may diſtinguiſh a true from a falſe Propoſition? If we have no *Criterion*, then no Propoſition whatever can be advanc'd but what will be juſtly conteſted, and be impoſſible to be pronounced true or falſe. If there is a *Criterion*, I deſire to know what it is? I know no other but *Perception*: for tho Truth abſtractly conſider'd conſiſts in the relations of agreement between Ideas; yet being here conſider'd relatively to human Underſtanding, it is not my Truth till I perceive it, nor can I know it to be true but by my own Perception. *Perception* therefore muſt be every Man's *Criterion* to diſtinguiſh Truth from Falſhood.

By

By this I deny not the diſtinctions of real and ſeeming Appearances, real and ſeeming Contradictions. There is often a juſt ground for ſuch a Diſtinction, and we may every day be convinc'd of it by examining the appearances of Things. We ſhall ſee that ſome Propoſitions did only ſeem to be repugnant to Reaſon, but were not really ſo. Yet notwithſtanding that we can only govern our ſelves by ſeeming relations and appearances, becauſe real relations and appearances can but ſeem to be relations and appearances. Now if the perception of the relations of Ideas be every man's *Criterion*, then that muſt perpetually be ſuppos'd to be ſo in all the train of our Reaſonings, and in all Propoſitions that are offered to our Aſſent; for if there be any one inſtance offered to our Aſſent, which deſtroys our Perception, then our Perception is not our *Criterion*, but ſomething elſe: therefore I ſay, if Perception be our *Criterion*, we cannot aſſent to two Propoſitions, which we perceive, or think that we perceive to be repugnant to each other.

3. We cannot be ſuppos'd to arrive at the knowledg of any antient Fact, whether it be a Revelation of God or any other Fact, but by the ſuppoſition of a Power in us, by comparing things with one another, to perceive their relations on

ſuch

ſuch Compariſon. Now to allow *Perception* to bring us to the knowledg of a Revelation or other Fact, and to ſuppoſe our Perception in ſome Inſtances of that Revelation or Fact not a juſt Criterion, whereby to diſtinguiſh things repugnant from things that are not ſo, is to deſtroy the Proofs of that Revelation or Fact, which ſuppos'd my Perception to be a juſt *Criterion.*

4. Teſtimony is as much an Application to our Faculties, tho it relates to a Revelation from God, as when it relates to any other Fact; and therefore the Propoſitions in that Revelation muſt be ſutable to the Apprehenſion of our Faculties. Suppoſe a Book was deliver'd to us as a Revelation from God upon Human Authority, that contain'd nothing but Affirmations or Negations contrary to our *Perceptions*, That Five and Five was Eleven, That the Parts which conſtitute the Whole were not equal to the Whole, and innumerable ſuch others as might be nam'd: what could ſuch a Book do but turn the World upſide down, bring Confuſion, Diſorder, and Uncertainty into all the Affairs of Mankind? And if the underſtanding theſe words, *This is my Body*, to ſignify the Popiſh Tranſubſtantiation, does not produce all thoſe diſmal Effects, it is only becauſe Men do not argue conſiſtently

ſiſtently and conſequentially from them as underſtood in that Senſe. What Dr. *Tillotſon* ſays in his Sermons, *Suppoſe a Man ſhould bring the higheſt Teſtimony imaginable of his Divine Miſſion, by working a Miracle for the Confirmation of his Doctrine; yet if there were any thing in the Doctrine repugnant to the natural Notions which I have of God, I could not receive it as coming from God*, is by a Parity of Reaſon applicable to any other abſurd Doctrines, tho confirm'd by any Evidence whatever, as well as to Doctrines repugnant to our natural Notions of God. For if there is equal certainty to be had of the Abſurdity of other things, or their Repugnancy to our natural Notions, as there is of what is repugnant to the natural Notions of God; and if our natural Notions of other things are as certain as our natural Notions of God, then it follows, that nothing which we judg repugnant to natural Notions ought to be aſſented to upon the higheſt Teſtimony whatever. Vol. 13. p. 7.

5. The Proofs of any matter of Fact not being in themſelves ſo ſure as is the Evidence of ſeveral Propoſitions, that by the Uſe of my Faculties I perceive to be true, there is no ground to admit any matter of Fact as true, which contradicts a Propoſition built on greater Evidence.

6. There

6. There are no ſigns of Religion obſervable among Brutes, and therefore it is a very proper Diſtinction betwen Men and Brutes, That the one is capable of Religion, but not the other. Now tho this makes a difference between them, yet it gives no Advantage to Man over Brutes, but ſinks him below them, upon ſuppoſition that Religion conſiſts in the Belief of Propoſitions, either repugnant to one another, or to Propoſitions which we perceive to be true; for by aſſenting to ſuch we put off Human Nature, or elſe are under uncertainties in all our Conduct, and are ſo much worſe than Beaſts, who by their Condition are not ſubject to our Perplexities, for having any Religion. And I would fain know in what good Senſe Religion can be ſaid to be natural to Man, when it is ſuppos'd to be contradictory to the perceptions of our Faculties.

Sect. 5. Thus it appears that theſe three Qualifications are neceſſary to make a matter of Fact credible upon any Teſtimony whatever: ſo that the Uſe of Reaſon in matters whoſe Evidence depends upon Teſtimony, is to perceive the Credibility of the Witneſs or Witneſſes, and the Credibility of the thing teſtify'd; both which produce an Evidence which forces our Aſſent, as much as the Perception of

the

the neceſſary agreement of Ideas. But there is ſtill a farther uſe of Reaſon in things which merely by the Teſtimony of Men are ſuppos'd to come from God, as diſtinguiſh'd from other Facts; and that is, to endeavour to find out ſuch a ſenſe of a ſuppos'd Revelation as is agreeable to the diſcoverys of our Reaſon, if the words under any kind of Conſtruction will bear it, tho at firſt view they may ſeem repugnant to reaſon, and to one another. This is certainly a great piece of Juſtice, and what is due to words, which upon the leaſt Evidence can be ſuppos'd to come from God, eſpecially ſince Expreſſions which do not literally quadrate with the Maxims of Reaſon and Philoſophy are neceſſary to make a Revelation have any effect on common Peoples Minds. For was not God to be repreſented by Expreſſions, which literally underſtood attribute to him Human Paſſions and Actions, they who by their Occupations in the World are incapable of thoſe more juſt Ideas which Men of Thought know belong to that *Being*, would perhaps think him incapable of taking cognizance of their Actions: and therefore to make a Revelation uſeful and credible in it ſelf, it muſt conſiſt of Words whoſe literal meaning is Falſe, but whoſe real meaning is conſiſtent with the juſteſt Notions of

Reaſon and Philoſophy. And therefore we ought to examine whether the Words under any Conſtruction will bear a reaſonable Senſe. Let us apply this more particularly to the Revelation that we acknowledg. It is moſt evident that the Authors of the Holy Scriptures had not principally in view Speculative-Inſtruction. They do not uſe their Phraſes as they do who have ſtudied the rules of Writing, that define their Words and uſe them always in the ſame ſenſe, but adapt their Expreſſions to the capacity of the bulk of Mankind. No doubt, had *Moſes* or any of the inſpired Writers been to write a Treatiſe of Metaphyſicks wherein they had treated of God, they moſt certainly would have ſpoken of him with exactneſs, and have elevated their Minds above all created Beings, and put nothing to appearance into their Idea of God, but what belong'd to an infinitely perfect Being. But in Treatiſes deſign'd principally to have a Moral effect, they make uſe of Expreſſions moſt likely to attain that end. God is therefore repreſented as having both Parts and Paſſions in the Scriptures. It is ſaid, That he *(a) Reſts*, *(b) Repents*, *(c)* is capable of *Anger*, *(d) is ignorant of the State of*

(a) Gen. 2. 3. *(b)* Gen. 6. 6. Ex. 32. 14. *(c)* Ex. 32. 10. *(d)* Gen. 18. 21, 26, 28, 30.

Adam,

Adam, *(a)* is *cheer'd with Wine*, *(b) Comes down to ſee how Things are*, *(c) Stands before* Moſes *on the Rock of* Horeb, *(d) has a Face*, *(e) a Finger with which he Writes*, and *(f) back Parts*. And therefore to underſtand ſuch a Book literally, and not make uſe of common Senſe whereby to adjuſt the ſeveral popular Expreſſions wherewith it abounds, to the Maxims of Reaſon and Philoſophy, would be unreaſonable in it ſelf, and juſtly expoſe it to the Scorn of Unbelievers. The Scripture it ſelf in other parts does ſuppoſe theſe Expreſſions to be literally falſe, when it tells us, that *(g) God is inviſible*, and *a (h) Spirit*; which is as much as to ſay that he is without Parts and Paſſions, and conſequently incapable of Standing, coming Down, having a Finger, back-*Parts*, or Repenting, being Angry, Ignorant, or cheer'd with Wine. Now this latter Idea of God agreeing with our common demonſtrated Notions of Reaſon and Philoſophy, we accommodate the Expreſſions firſt cited to theſe laſt, and not the laſt to the firſt, and ought to have done ſo tho the Scriptures had been intirely ſilent as to

---

(a) Judg. 9. 13. *(b)* Gen. 11. 5, 7, 18, 21. Ex. 3. 4. *(c)* Ex. 17. 6. *(d)* Gen. 32. 30. Ex. 33. 11. *(e)* Ex. 31. 18. *(f)* Ex. 33. 23. *(g)* 1 Tim. 1. 17. Heb. 11. 27. *(h)* John 4. 24.

God's being *Inviſible* and a *Spirit*, tho the contrary might have been a juſt rule in interpreting the words of any *Greek* or *Roman* Author. We know it is impoſſible for God to mean abſurdly, but for Man it is not. *Herodotus* and *Livy* may abound with falſe Hiſtory, falſe Divinity, and falſe Reaſoning, but the Spirit of God can ſpeak nothing but Truth. That moſt excellent Perſon Archbiſhop *Tillotſon* has a Paſſage very full to my purpoſe. *There is*, ſays he, *no neceſſity that it ſhould any where have been ſaid in Scripture, God is a Spirit, it being the natural Notion of God; no more than it is neceſſary it ſhould be told us that God is Good, or that he is Infinite, and the like; or that the Scriptures ſhould tell us that there is a God. All theſe are manifeſt by the Light of nature, and therefore it doth not teach us Philoſophy, nor ſollicitouſly inſtruct us in thoſe Things which are born with us, but ſuppoſeth the Knowledg of them.*

Sermons Vol. 7. p. 301.

Sect. 6. Beſides endeavouring to put a true ſenſe on Words, which literally underſtood imply what is falſe, there is ſtill this further reſpect due to Writings, which upon Human Teſtimony are ſuppos'd to come from God; not to reject the whole for the ſake of ſome Paſſages which cannot be ſuppos'd to proceed from God, but

but rather to preſume they have been added to the Text, out of ſome particular Views and Deſigns: Whereas merely Human Writings may be fairly rejected or deny'd to proceed from the Author whoſe name they bear, if there are ſeveral Paſſages contain'd in them inconſiſtent with the Character of the Authors or the Times wherein they liv'd; becauſe there is not that reaſon for either zealous or deſigning Men to make additions to Books that are not ſuppos'd neceſſary for the direction of our Theory and Practice, as to thoſe that have or are likely to have any influence on our Lives and Opinions. And this reſpect due to writings, which upon Human Teſtimony are ſuppos'd to come from God, is acknowledg'd neceſſary by ſeveral (if not all) Interpreters of the Scriptures, to prevent the imputation of Falſhood, which otherwiſe would neceſſarily be fix'd on them by the beſt diſpos'd Minds. A few inſtances will ſhow the reaſonableneſs of the Rule, and its Application to what we eſteem of Divine Revelation.

1*ſt*. In *Exodus* 16. 35. it is ſaid, *And the Children of* Iſrael *did eat Manna forty Years until they came to a Land inhabited: they did eat Manna until they came to the borders of the Land of* Canaan. Now God could never make *Moſes* (who wrote

this Book) ſay that *the Children of* Iſrael *did eat Manna forty Years*, when he died before the forty Years in which the Children of *Iſrael* eat Manna were expir'd; and conſequently, as the celebrated * *Huetius* argues, *It is moſt likely that theſe words were added by* Eſdras, *who*, in another † place, he ſays, *did ſupply the Scriptures with Additions in thoſe places which were obſcure or difficult.*

* Dem. Evang. Edit. Par. p. 180.

† p. 178.

2*dly*. Another Inſtance to this purpoſe may be found in *Deut*. 3. 14. Jair *Son of* Manaſſeh *took all the Country of* Argob *unto the Coaſts of* Geſhuri *and* Maachathi; *and called them after his own Name*, Baſhan-havoth-jair, *unto this day*. Now God by *Moſes* could never have ſaid *unto this day*, for *Jair* was but juſt in poſſeſſion of the *Country of* Argob, call'd by him *Baſhan-havoth-jair*, before *Moſes*'s Death; whereas the words *unto this day*, ſuppoſe the *Country of* Argob had gone a long while under the name of *Baſhan-havoth-jair*, and plainly proceed from a Modern Antiquary, who gives the Original and Reaſon of a Name of a Place, which has been for a long while in uſe. This Inſtance makes

‖ P. 178.

‖ *Huetius confeſs that either* Eſdras *added theſe Words, or that they have crept into the Text from the Margin.* I might multiply Inſtances of this kind, and particularly with reſpect to the Books of *Moſes*

and

and *Joſhua* ſhow how almoſt all the Names of Places in their writings were Modern to the time wherein they wrote, and conſequently that the old Names were left out, and the new ſubſtituted in their room, as likewiſe in the Accounts of *Moſes*'s and *Joſhua*'s Deaths which were no doubt added to their Books; but that it is beſides my deſign here to be particular beyond what is requiſite to prove the neceſſity of the uſe of Reaſon to diſtinguiſh Falſhood from Truth in matters of Revelation, in order to give all poſſible Authority to that which can with any reaſon be ſuppos'd to be a Revelation.

Sect. 7. Having laid down the uſe of Reaſon in things whoſe Evidence depends upon Human Teſtimony, I ſhall conſider the principal Objections that may be urg'd againſt what I have deliver'd; and I cannot do that more effectually than by examining the ſeveral Senſes put on the famous Diſtinction of *Things above, and Things contrary to Reaſon*: for'tis chiefly by virtue of that Diſtinction the Divines militate in behalf of Myſterys and Contradictions, againſt thoſe who ſay they can only believe that which they can underſtand. But before I proceed I ſhall briefly lay down the Diſtinction of Propoſitions one from another, as they are the Objects of

our Aſſent or Diſſent. Propoſitions however offered to us conſiſting of Terms which ſtand for Ideas and their Relations, we aſſent when the Relations between the Ideas join'd are agreeable to Reaſon, and diſſent when they are contrary to Reaſon. As for inſtance, I am aſſur'd by proper Evidence of Jeſus Chriſt's Reſurrection. His Reſurrection containing no repugnancy to any Truth that I know of, becomes by the Evidence of Teſtimony agreeable to my Reaſon, as much as any Propoſition in Mathematicks does by the mere uſe of my own Faculties, or the aſſiſtance of others. But the Doctrine of Tranſubſtantiation, containing a manifeſt repugnancy to ſeveral Propoſitions which I know to be true, is contrary to Reaſon, as any Propoſition is, in any Science whatever, that conſiſts of repugnant Ideas. Theſe two Propoſitions do indeed become Objects of Aſſent or Diſſent by the means of Teſtimony; but the different manner of their becoming Objects of my Underſtanding from other Propoſitions, diſtinguiſhes them not from any other Propoſitions conſider'd as Objects of Aſſent or Diſſent. In all Caſes the Aſſent ſhould follow the perception of the agreement of Ideas, as the Diſſent ſhould the repugnancy of Ideas. So that all Propoſitions conſider'd as Objects of Aſſent or Diſſent, are adequately divided into Propoſitions agreeable or contrary

trary to Reaſon; and there remains no third Idea under which to rank them, as will appear more plainly by examining the Senſes aſſignable to the words *above Reaſon*, which are applied to ſome Propoſitions, as contradiſtinguiſh'd from Propoſitions agreeable to, and contrary to Reaſon.

1. The firſt Senſe of the Diſtinction of *things above and contrary to Reaſon*, I ſhall take from Mr. *Boyle*, who in a Tract ſubjoin'd to his *Chriſtian Virtuoſo*, wherein he particularly treats of that *Diſtinction*, ſays: *Suppoſe that on a deep Sea a Diver ſhould bid you tell him what you can ſee there; that which you would anſwer, would be, that you can ſee into a Sea-green Liquor to the depth of ſome Yards, and no farther: So that if he ſhould further ask you whether you ſee what lies at the bottom of the Sea, you would return him a Negative anſwer. If afterwards the Diver letting himſelf down to the Bottom, ſhould thence bring up and ſhew you Oyſters and Muſcles with Pearls in them; you would eaſily acknowledg both that they lay beyond the reach of your ſight, and conſequently argued an Imperfection in it, and that the Pearls have the genuin Luſtre and Colour that naturally belongs to ſuch Gems. But if this Diver ſhould pretend that each of theſe Pearls he ſhews you, is as large as a Tennis-Ball, or ſome of them bigger than* P. 3, 4.

the

the Shells they were inclos'd in, you would doubtleſs judg what he aſſerts contrary to the Informations of your Eyes. What Mr. *Boyle* means by this Inſtance is undoubtedly true, for every one may experience that there are ſeveral things become Objects of our Senſes by the means of others, which merely by the uſe of our Facultys employ'd about our own Ideas we ſhould not have arriv'd at, but when made known to us are agreeable to our Reaſon. But as the Terms *contrary to Reaſon* ſtand not for one manner of arriving at the Perception of Propoſitions diſtinct from another manner, but only for the repugnant appearance of any Propoſitions, however they become Objects of the Underſtanding; ſo *above Reaſon* muſt ſtand for another kind of appearance of Objects to our Underſtanding, in order to make a Diſtinction; for a Diſtinction ſuppoſes ſome common Agreement in the things diſtinguiſh'd. Now what common Agreement is there between things repugnant to Reaſon, however they become Objects of our Underſtanding, and things that become Objects of our Underſtanding after a peculiar manner? One manner is properly diſtinguiſhable from another manner, as the manner of knowing by a Diver is different from the manner of arriving at Truth by the mere uſe of ones own Ideas. And

the

the appearances of things to our Understanding are different and so distinguishable, but the manner and the appearance are improperly distinguish'd, and serve only to confound Men. The distinction therefore must lie in a different manner of appearance of things to our Understanding, from what repugnant Propositions, or Propositions contrary to Reason do, and that I conceive can only lie in being *agreeable to Reason.*

2. A second Sense of this Distinction may be illustrated by this Instance. Let us suppose a Traveller to whose Character there is no exception, gives us Informations of Places unknown to us before his Discovery; That they are inhabited by Men like our selves, that are linked together in civil Government, that worship the Sun, Moon, and Stars, and have not the use of Fire. All which is both credible in it self, and beyond the Powers of our own Minds, by the use of our Ideas, without the assistance of Testimony, to know, as it was in the former Case, without the assistance of the Diver, to know what was at the bottom of the Sea: but if he should say that the Men have existed there from all Eternity, he would advance not only what was above our Reason to discover, but what was contrary to it. The distinction us'd in this sense is liable to

just

juſt the ſame Objection as was urg'd in the former Caſe. For here that Diſtinction is made to lie between the manner of arriving at a Propoſition, and the appearance of a Propoſition to our Underſtanding, (*above Reaſon* ſignifying things which we know by Teſtimony, and contrary *to Reaſon* things that appear repugnant to Reaſon, and ſo not a proper Diſtinction.) If the Diſtinction lie as it ought between the things conſider'd as Objects of the Underſtanding, having different appearances to it, thoſe things before mention'd as *above Reaſon*, will be agreeable to Reaſon: for that there are Places unknown to us, that they are inhabited by Men, *&c.* are all Suppoſitions that are agreeable to Reaſon or contain no Abſurdity in them; and conſequently there is no ground for any other Diſtinction of things, as Objects of our Aſſent or Diſſent, but that they be either agreeable or contrary to Reaſon.

3. A thing is ſaid to be *above Reaſon*, when we have not an Idea exactly conformable to the thing our Idea refers to. What is meant here by *above Reaſon*, is no doubt true in Fact of moſt if not all our Ideas, for to be ſure we have very few adequate Ideas of things. But *above Reaſon* is here viſibly us'd for things that are not at all the Objects of

the

the Underſtanding; for whatever exiſts which falls not within the compaſs of our Ideas, is nothing to us, nor can we talk or think about it. So much as we perceive of a thing by the mediation of Ideas, ſo much we comprehend, and is agreeable to our Reaſon; and what we do not perceive by the mediation of Ideas, may, if you pleaſe, be call'd *above Reaſon* as a thing unknown to us, but not as an Object of the Mind about which we may imploy our Facultys: and 'tis to things as Objects of the Mind, that the Diſtinction of above and contrary to Reaſon is apply'd.

4. Things are ſaid to be *above Reaſon*, when we are ignorant of the manner, or of the Phyſical Cauſe of their Exiſtence: As for inſtance, we know not how Matter exiſts, nor how the Parts hang together, nor why one Syſtem of Matter is Green, and another Red. As in the laſt inſtance, ſo here it is viſible the words *above Reaſon*, do not ſtand for any thing that is the Object of the Underſtanding; for whenever the Manner or Phyſical Cauſe of a thing is unknown, we can frame no Propoſitions about it: Nothing remains as an Object for us upon which to exert our Aſſent or Diſſent. We have an Idea of Matter exiſting, of its Parts cohering, and of its being colour'd; and perfectly comprehend what we have Ideas of, and ſee

no

no manner of repugnancy in our Conceptions, ſee nothing but what is perfectly agreeable to Reaſon: But as for the Phyſical Cauſes of theſe things, which are ſo agreeable to our Reaſon, we can no more reaſon or diſcourſe about them than a blind Man can about Colours, or any Man can about what St. *Paul* ſaw when he was lifted up into the third Heavens; and conſequently the words *above Reaſon*, in this ſenſe, ſtand for nothing which is the Object of the Underſtanding.

5. *By things above Reaſon* is ſometimes underſtood things of which we have no Idea, and which yet may be the Objects of our Aſſent. Now tho, beyond diſpute, a great many things exiſt of which we have no Idea; yet Ideas and Acts of the Mind being relative, there can be no Act of the Mind where there is no Idea, or no Object: and therefore tho there is a juſt ground from the narrowneſs of our Underſtanding to ſay things exiſt of which we have no Idea; yet there is no ground, in this ſenſe, to apply the Diſtinction to Objects of the Underſtanding: for then a thing might be an Object of the Underſtanding, and not an Object at the ſame time. But leſt I may be thought to injure ſomebody in this ſenſe of the Diſtinction, I will ſhow the Reader that Dr. *Gaſtrel* (and I might inſtance in many Divines) makes the

the Doctrine of the Trinity no otherwiſe the Object of our Faith than in this laſt ſenſe given to the words *above Reaſon*. In his *Conſiderations of the Trinity*, having *enumerated all the Kinds of Unity and Diſtinction that he could imagine*, as he ſays, gives us, purſuant to that Enumeration, two Definitions of the word *Perſon*. 1. *A particular Intelligent Being*. 2. *An Office, Character, or ſome ſuch complex Notion applicable to ſuch a Being*. *In the firſt ſenſe*, ſays he, *one Man, or one Angel, is one Perſon: and ſeveral Men, or ſeveral Angels, are ſeveral Perſons. In the ſecond ſenſe of the word, there may be ſo many Perſons as there are different Combinations of the Actions, Relations, and Circumſtances of Intelligent Beings*. *Now*, ſays he, *God cannot be Three and One in the ſame reſpect, nor three Intelligent Beings*, for Reaſons which he aſſigns; and then concludes in theſe words, *From whence it follows, that according to the Notions we are capable of framing of Unity and Diſtinction, with reference to the Holy Trinity, all the Perſonal Diſtinction we can conceive in the Deity muſt be founded on ſome acceſſory Ideas extrinſecal to the Divine Nature, a certain Combination of which Ideas make up the ſecond Notion ſignify'd by the word* Perſon. *And if we impartially*, ſays he, *examine our own Thoughts upon this Subject, we ſhall find that*

Pag. 26.

Pag. 27.

Pag. 29.

Pag. 31.

that when we name God the Father, we conceive the Idea of God ſo far as we are capable of conceiving it acting ſo and ſo, under ſuch Reſpects and Relations; and when we name God the Son, we conceive nothing but the ſame Idea of God over again under different Relations, and ſo likewiſe of the Holy Ghoſt. But if this be all, ſays he, *that is meant by Trinity and Unity, Three Perſons and One God, where is that ſtupendous Myſtery ſo much ador'd by ſome? What is it has ſtagger'd the Faith and puzzled the Underſtandings of ſo many learned and inquiſitive Men in all Ages ſince this Doctrine was firſt deliver'd? This,* ſays he, *is an invincible Prejudice againſt the Account now given, and indeed againſt any other Explication whatſoever that has nothing in it hard to be underſtood or believ'd: for how can it be imagin'd that what has paſs'd for a Myſtery theſe ſixteen hundred Years, ſhould now at laſt be comprehended as plainly as a common ordinary Notion? But if this account of the Trinity be too eaſy, and falls ſhort of thoſe high Expreſſions of Diſtinction found in the Scripture,* as he thinks *it does, and no other grounded upon any Notions our Souls have fram'd of Unity and Diſtinction, can be true and conſiſtent,* as he has before particularly prov'd: *Then,* ſays he, *it neceſſarily follows, that God muſt be One and Three in ſome way and manner not conceivable by Human*

man Underſtanding. I cannot better expoſe the Diſtinction in the ſenſe given in the beginning of this Article, than by what Dr. *Gaſtrel* here ſays; for it amounts to an Endeavour to demonſtrate, that if we have Ideas to our Words when we profeſs to believe in the Doctrine of three Perſons and one God, the Ideas muſt be inconſiſtent with themſelves, or with the Article of the Trinity. If we define the word *Perſon* by an intelligent Being, we make the Doctrine to conſiſt in this, That three Intelligent Beings are but one Intelligent Being, which is a Contradiction: And if we define *Perſon* to be an Office or Character, we give an Idea to that Word inconſiſtent with what is laid down about that Doctrine in the Scripture, where there is evidently a greater Diſtinction between the Perſons than that Definition ſuppoſes: for the Perſons, according to the Doctor, are made in Scripture to have exiſted from all Eternity; whereas that Definition ſuppoſes the ſeveral Perſons had a beginning: for Offices or Characters being *extrinſecal, acceſſory Ideas*, muſt commence in ſome particular point of time, and conſequently on that ſuppoſition there was a time when there was no Trinity at all. This in others would be call'd doing their utmoſt to demonſtrate the Impoſſibility of believing the Doctrine of the Trinity;

for what particular Doctrine can be assented to, when we have no Ideas to the Terms that are suppos'd to express it? All that remains is, that by those Terms in which the Doctrine of the Trinity is express'd, God meant something or had Ideas, and that those Ideas have a relation to one another. Now if our Belief consists only in this, That God has Ideas to such and such Words, and that those Ideas do agree to one another; what can be more plain or less hard to be understood than this? Do we not meet with Men every day that use Words for Ideas peculiar to themselves, and that may for ought we know perceive a Relation between those Ideas? Is there any more Mystery or Difficulty in believing this, than there is in assenting to that Notion of the Trinity, which the Doctor, for its Easiness, rejects; and because there is nothing in it to stagger the Faith of a Man of Learning and Sense? Is not the Easiness of this Notion as invincible a prejudice against believing this to be a just account of the Trinity, as the Easiness of believing the Trinity in Unity, under the Notion of one and the same Being consider'd under different Relations? But tho this is all that remains upon Dr. *Gastrel*'s Principles to be really an Object of Belief; yet in the Question of the Trinity, it is too ridiculous for him plainly and directly

directly to assert, however fully imply'd in his Discourse. The Ridiculousness of it will appear if we consider, that when the Unitarians make any Objections to the Doctrine of the Trinity, it must be to that Doctrine consider'd under some Idea; or else they object to they know not what, as well as Dr. *G.* believes he knows not what. But upon the Doctor's Principles, this must be his Answer: Gentlemen, you object as if we meant some particular Doctrine when we profess to believe in the Doctrine of the Trinity, or had Ideas to the words that we use on that occasion; but we mean no particular Doctrine at all, and therefore your Objections are not level'd against the Doctrine of the Trinity. Indeed we have thought fit to inlarge our form of words, by composing the *Athanasian* Creed; but we mean no more by that Creed than we did before, which was nothing at all, unless it were to give those Men a good many words that signify nothing, who were not satisfy'd with nothing in a few words. So that in short, the *Trinitarians*, according to the Doctor, must believe that God himself came down from Heaven to reveal his Will to Mankind, and to require Man's Assent to a Revelation, one of the fundamental Articles, without which a Man cannot be a Christian, is express'd in such a manner, that God might as well have given

us Marks or written Characters that anſwer'd to no one Language known among Men; and there would have been juſt as much matter for Belief, as there can be in Signs that we are accuſtom'd to, and can give no particular ſignification of. However, to make Dr. *G.* ſomewhat more conſiderable than this reaſoning of his does, I give him an Authority on his ſide. St. *Auſtin* ſays, *When Men ask what is meant by the Three, all Human Speech wants Power to expreſs it; we have ventur'd to ſay Three Perſons, not that it ſhould be ſaid, but that we may not be wholly ſilent.* And truly the Clergy in all Ages, ſome out of Pride, unwilling to profeſs their Ignorance, the more Cunning to get Power and Dominion over the Minds and Conſciences of Men, have agreed to talk unintelligibly, and the moſt zealous out of Ignorance; and 'tis Charity perfectly if I rank the Doctor among the laſt: tho ſome may think he wrote with a deſign to expoſe the Doctrine of the Trinity, *which*, he ſays, *is ſo much ador'd by ſome*; and from ſome Paſſages may be induc'd to believe that he thinks he has demonſtrated the Impoſſibility of believing that Doctrine; becauſe *among the Conditions requiſite to make it poſſible for us to believe a thing*, he makes this to be one, *that we underſtand the Terms: for Faith*, ſays he, *concerns only the Truth and Falſhood*

In lib. de Trin. 5. c. 7.

P. 13, 14.

hood of Propoſitions; the Terms of which a Propoſition conſiſts muſt be underſtood before we can pronounce any thing concerning the Truth or Falſhood of it, which is nothing but the Agreement or Diſagreement of its Terms, or the Ideas expreſs'd by them. If I have no knowledg at all of the meaning of the Terms as'd in a Propoſition, I cannot exerciſe any act of my Underſtanding about it, I cannot ſay I believe or disbelieve any thing; my Soul is perfectly in the ſame State it was before, without receiving any new Determination. In the Paſſages I cited out of Dr. *Gaſtrel* before, he endeavours to demonſtrate that we have no Meaning or Ideas to the words which expreſs the Doctrine of the Trinity; and in this Paſſage he gives us his Opinion what a Man can do in that Caſe, *That he cannot exerciſe any act of his Underſtanding about it; that he cannot believe or disbelieve any thing.* I ſay, I ſhould be tempted to think that the Doctor could hardly help putting theſe Paſſages together, and form a ſutable Act of his Underſtanding; *i. e.* neither believe nor disbelieve the Doctrine of the Trinity; But I do not know what to think of him or his Capacity, when I find him ſaying, *That Identity is nothing elſe but a repetition of Unity, as Number is of Difference:* Whereas Identity conſiſts in this, That the Ideas it is attributed to, or P. 26.

for which the Term ſtands, vary not at all from what they were that moment wherein we conſider their former Exiſtence, and to which we compare the preſent; and Number conſiſts not *in a repetition of Difference*, as the Doctor ſays, but in a repetition of Unity. And I may e'en put him here on the level with his Adverſary Dr. *Sherlock*, who has got as much Reputation by writing Nonſenſe, as Dr. *Gaſtrel* would have loſt had he wrote nothing but Senſe; who, in his *Defence of his Notion of a Trinity in Unity*, &c. 4to. 1694. makes this Diſtinction, That a thing may be *Individual, but not Single*: And, *That the ſame one Individual Nature ſubſiſts thrice in three real Subſiſtences, not by multiplying, but only by repeating it ſelf.*

P. 18, 19.

P. 24.

2. The laſt ſenſe of this Diſtinction is as follows. Divines not being able to anſwer the Objections from Reaſon made to their Doctrines, will ſometimes allow them to be contrary to Human Reaſon, but not contrary to the Divine Reaſon; and in that ſenſe underſtand the Diſtinction of things above, and things contrary to Reaſon. So that *above Reaſon*, and *contrary to Reaſon*, are Expreſſions of the ſame Import, and there is an Equivoque in the uſe of the word *Reaſon*. Now the Equivoque lies here, that they do not give the ſame ſenſe to the word *Reaſon* in the

the firſt part of this Diſtinction that they do in the laſt: for ſuppoſe that they always underſtood by *Reaſon*, Reaſon in general; or the Supreme Reaſon, Reaſon as it is in God; it is equally true that the Myſterys of the Goſpel are neither above nor contrary to Reaſon. But if in each branch of this Diſtinction by *Reaſon* is underſtood Human Reaſon, then there is no ſenſe in the Diſtinction; becauſe they confeſs that the Myſterys of Religion have not a conformity with the Maxims of Reaſon and Philoſophy, which is the very ſame thing with being contrary to our Reaſon: and therefore it would be all one to ſay, That the Myſterys of Faith are contrary to Reaſon, as that they are above our Reaſon. The Diſtinction then clear'd from all Equivoque lies here, That there are things contrary to Human Reaſon, but not contrary to Divine Reaſon. The Writings of the Clergy are full of Expreſſions which juſtify the ſenſe I have now put on the Diſtinction; and the parallel Inſtances which they give to juſtify their aſſenting to things contrary to Human Reaſon, are a farther Evidence.

Dr. *Sherlock* in his *preſent State of the Socinian Controverſy*, ſays, *He ſhall tell Dr.G. as evident as he thinks it, this Propoſition is falſe*, That it is impoſſible to believe what implys a Contradiction to our former P. 83.

Knowledg, *and that God may oblige us to believe ſuch a Contradiction.*

Mr. *Garrol* in his *Diſſertation on Mr.* Lock's *tenth Chapter of his Eſſay on Human Underſtanding*, as an Inſtance of Mr. *Lock's extolling Reaſon, and ſubverting the Nature and Uſe of Divine Revelation and Faith*, produces theſe words out of Mr. *Lock*'s Eſſay: "And therefore nothing, "that is contrary to and inconſiſtent with "the clear and ſelf-evident Dictates of "Reaſon, has a right to be urg'd or af- "ſented to as a matter of Faith, wherein "Reaſon has nothing to do." And again, "Nor can we be oblig'd, where we have "the clear and evident ſentence of Rea- "ſon, to quit it for the contrary Opinion, "under a pretence that it is a matter of "Faith; which can have no Authority "againſt the plain and clear Dictates of "Reaſon."

P. 279.

B. 4. c. 18. §. 10.

Mr. *Gilbert* in his *Reflections on Dr.* Fleetwood's *Eſſay upon Miracles*, thinks Mr. *Clark* in the wrong, in affirming, "That "a Man may reject the proof of Mira- "cles, how true or great ſoever, if, in his "reaſon, he thinks the Doctrine they "would prove to be an Abſurdity, or to "imply a Contradiction, or to be of evil "Tendency or Conſequence." *And thus*, ſays he, *Mr.* Clark *has given up all ſuch Explications of the Eternal Generation of the*

P. 487.

P. 295. of his Lectures, vol. 2.

the Son of God, as can be reduc'd to imply or involve any Contradiction; which makes him *fear leſt he be forc'd to give up the Truth of the Scripture it ſelf to thoſe that think they have, by juſt and neceſſary Conſequences, reduc'd its Doctrine in this or any other Caſe, or the Senſe wherein the Church hath underſtood it, to imply a Contradiction.* P. 490.

Whether the Socinians, *at this rate, may not form for us another Goſpel, and the Deiſts reject the whole, is a thing to be conſider'd.* P. 491.

The Diſtinction thus underſtood is perfectly unintelligible: for tho we have Ideas to the words *contrary to Human Reaſon*, yet we have none to the words *contrary to Divine Reaſon*; and ſo we diſtinguiſh *Human Reaſon* from we know not what; unleſs we underſtand by *Divine Reaſon*, Reaſon as it is in Man, and then there is no manner of ground for a Diſtinction, for a thing can never be diſtinguiſh'd from it ſelf. However, to make good the Diſtinction in this ſenſe, ſome mathematical and phyſical Inſtances are produc'd, where it is pretended that Men aſſent upon no leſs evidence than Demonſtration; and yet the Propoſitions aſſented to do ſeem to us to involve or imply Contradictions. *It is demonſtrable*, ſays *Dr.* Edwards, in his *fourth Preſervative againſt* Socinianiſm, *That Quantity is diviſible* in infinitum; *and yet for all this it is liable* P. 53.

to

to unanſwerable Objections: for it ſeems to overthrow ſeveral ſelf-evident and acknowledg'd Truths.

P. 54. And, *That ever ſince* Euclid's *days, it hath been an acknowledg'd Truth, that the Angle of Contact contain'd between a ſtrait Line, and the Circumference of any Circle which it touches, is leſs than the leaſt Angle contain'd by two ſtrait Lines: And yet what Paradoxes and Abſurditys flow from it, acknowledg'd even by Mathematicians themſelves?*

Ibid. *That two Lines ſhould for ever approach, and yet never meet one another, is what puzzles and confounds the Imagination to conceive; and yet is found to be certainly true in thoſe Lines which are call'd* Aſymptot, *and prov'd to be ſo by clear Demonſtration.*

Upon this I crave leave to remark, that ſuppoſing, with reſpect to theſe and ſome other Inſtances, Man is really reduc'd to this State, as to perceive Demonſtration on the one ſide for the truth of a Propoſition, and at the ſame time perceive *Abſurditys* and *Paradoxes flow* from the thing demonſtrated: I ſay, he ought not to aſſent or diſſent, becauſe there is a ballance of Evidence; for any Propoſition involving an *Abſurdity* or Contradiction, is as much a Demonſtration of the falſhood of that Propoſition, as any grounds *a priori* can be

be of its Truth; becauſe the Perception of the Diſagreement of our Ideas is as plain as is the Perception of the Agreement. Now if it is our Duty neither to aſſent or diſſent in the Caſes propos'd, by reaſon of the ballance of Evidence, they will by no means reach the Caſe of Articles of Faith, ſuppos'd to be inconſiſtent with ſome ſelf-evident Propoſitions; becauſe we have no Evidence for the truth of Revelation, equal to our Perception of the truth of thoſe Propoſitions call'd ſelf-evident: and therefore our Perceptions muſt be our Rule againſt any ſuch pretended Revelations. It will perhaps be ſaid, that I deſtroy the Diſtinction between real and ſeeming Contradiction. To which I anſwer, that I do neither deny nor deſtroy that Diſtinction, but do allow of it; but then I ſay that it is manifeſtly of no uſe when apply'd to the Underſtanding, but only to teach us to examine with Care and Caution, ſince we are liable to be deceiv'd, before we leave off Examination: for while things appear repugnant, we muſt judg them to be repugnant, if we will ever make any judgment at all.

2. I deny that if we examine carefully that any Contradiction or Abſurdity follows from a demonſtrated Propoſition, and affirm, that wherever we have capacity enough to perceive the truth of a Propoſition,

poſition, we have capacity enough to perceive that there is no repugnancy between that and another true Propoſition. And I think I could plainly ſhow that thoſe mathematical and phyſical Inſtances might be ſolv'd, did Men but conſider ſufficiently the Ideas of their Minds, for of them only Truth conſiſts; and think preciſely on them. And I deſire thoſe who think them uncapable of Solution, to give me but intelligible Definitions of the Words, and I undertake to reſolve all the Difficultys attending them. What cauſes the Difficulty is, that the term *Infinite* is ſuppos'd to ſtand for ſomething incomprehenſible; whereas *Infinity* ought, like all other words in our Language, to have a determin'd Idea fix'd to it when us'd in a Propoſition, and not ſtand for any thing exiſting, any farther than it has a conformity to our Idea; and conſequently the term *Infinity* ſhould ſtand for an Idea, which we can as well comprehend as the number *Three*, or the colour *Red*. The contrary ſeems to me to amount to this great Abſurdity, That when we uſe the term *Infinity*, we have a Meaning or Idea to it, and have not a Meaning to it: This, well attended to, would clear thoſe Inſtances from the charge of Abſurdity. I ſhall not go over them one by one, becauſe the Propoſitions themſelves are of no great conſequence to

our

our Conduct; but that it may appear, that I do not omit them out of any difficulty that I conceive to be in them, I ſhall make choice of two others, which the Men of Myſtery conſtantly dwell on, becauſe they relate to the belief of all Men, and are conceiv'd to be as difficult as any of the former Inſtances: theſe are,

(1.) The ſeeming Inconſiſtence of the Divine Preſcience with the Liberty of Man.

(2.) Our Notion or Idea of Eternity: both which, I doubt not to clear up from all Abſurditys, which in our way of conceiving are thought to follow from them; and thereby convince the Reader, that we are not in that abſurd State which the Clergy would put us into, nor in that ſceptical one which is the direct Conſequence of their Opinions.

1. As to the firſt, *the irreconcileableneſs of the divine Preſcience with the Liberty of Man*; tho it has been a Problem which has exercis'd the Learned in all Ages, yet I take the matter to be ſo clear, that I cannot forbear thinking, that nothing but the Intereſt of ſome, or Prejudice of others, in behalf of receiv'd Syſtems, could make it a queſtion of difficulty. I know very well, that Divines put ſuch an Idea to the Term *Liberty*, as is directly inconſiſtent with the Divine Preſcience; for they

they ſuppoſe Liberty to ſtand for a Power in Man to determin himſelf, and conſequently that there are ſeveral Actions of Man abſolutely contingent, ſince they depend as to their Exiſtence on Man, who determins their Exiſtence from himſelf, without regard to any extrinſecal Cauſes. Now I readily own it impoſſible, to make the Divince Preſcience conſiſt with ſuch an Idea of Liberty. For all Actions whatever are prov'd to be certain by the ſuppoſition of a Divine Preſcience (for if they are foreknown they muſt certainly be) and by the ſuppoſition of Man's Liberty in this ſenſe are prov'd to be contingent. Now I cannot put together certain and contingent, or certain and incertain at the ſame time. I allow the ſame Action may be certain, and relatively contingent (that is, contingent as to us, or of which together with its Cauſes we are ignorant before they happen, however certain in themſelves; and thus we apply the word Chance, when we are ignorant of the Cauſes of an Action, tho properly ſpeaking there is no ſuch thing as Chance, becauſe no Action is without its Cauſes) but the word Contingent is here taken abſolutely, or elſe the Idea of Liberty, as it conſiſts in a Power to determin ones ſelf, without regard to any external Cauſes compelling it, is deſtroy'd,

and

and another Idea put into its room, inconſiſtent with the Liberty contended for.

Now this Idea of Liberty is not only inconſiſtent with the ſuppoſition of the Divine Preſcience, but inconſiſtent with Truth: and to make that appear, I ſhall ſhow wherein our Liberty conſiſts, and then its conſiſtency with the Divine Preſcience. Every man may obſerve in himſelf, a Power to do or forbear ſeveral Actions, according to the Determination of his Mind: if the Mind determins the doing of an Action, there is in ſome Caſes no outward Impediment to hinder him from acting according to that Determination; and not only no outward Impediment, but the forbearance of the Action would have been equally in his Power, if the Mind had determin'd a forbearance. As for inſtance, if a man ſits in a Room with the Door open, he has plainly a Power to go out of that Room, if he prefers going out to ſtaying in; he has likewiſe a Power to ſtay, if he prefers ſtaying to going out: Let his Mind determin which way it will, he has then a Power of acting according to that Determination. And this is the greateſt Freedom or Liberty we can conceive to belong to any Being; and by this Idea of Liberty or Freedom from Compulſion, God is plainly

plainly the moſt free Being that can be conceiv'd, becauſe the doing or forbearing all Actions according to the Determination of his Will, are in his Power. He can will nothing but what is poſſible, and there can be no Bar or Impediment to hinder an omnipotent Being from doing or forbearing things poſſible in themſelves, tho Man's Liberty is reſtrain'd to a few Actions by the Weakneſs of his Powers, very much below the poſſibility of things. This Idea of Liberty is far from being inconſiſtent with the certainty of an Action, and conſequently with the Divine Preſcience: for here is nothing contingent in the whole Chain, but every thing as certain as our Knowledg that God foreſees every thing ſuppoſes. For there are Cauſes that ever determin the Will, as the appearing good or evil Conſequences; there are other Cauſes of the appearing good or evil Conſequences, and Cauſes of thoſe Cauſes, and ſo on; and no one Action in this long Progreſſion of Cauſes, extend it as far as you pleaſe, could poſſibly not happen. For ſuppoſe the Color and Flavor of a Peach makes me will it, while it appears thus agreeable, I muſt will it. The Peach muſt appear thus agreeable, while my Appetite and Organs are diſpos'd as they are; and innumerable Cauſes have preceded to make the Peach appear

pear in the manner it does, ſuch as the Care of the Gardiner, *&c.* Now my Action of taking or forbearing this Peach is as certain, as is the Color and Flavor which makes it agreeable or diſagreeable, or as is the Determination of my Will, according to its appearing agreeableneſs or diſagreeableneſs, (tho it was equally in my power to take or forbear it according to the Determination of my Will; that is, had my Mind determin'd a forbearance, there was no compulſive external Force to oblige me to take it; or had my Mind determin'd the taking of it, there was no external compulſive Force to oblige me to forbear taking it) for while I prefer or will taking the Peach to letting it alone, I cannot help acting, that Preference being the immediate, neceſſary, impelling Cauſe; tho I could as plainly, and muſt as neceſſarily have let it alone, had my Mind given a different Determination. So that ſtop where you will in this Train of Cauſes, you will not, nor cannot have the Idea of any thing, but what has certain and neceſſary Cauſes, and conſequently what muſt certainly and neceſſarily be. I have us'd the words Certainly and Neceſſarily for the ſame thing in this caſe, becauſe I cannot diſtinguiſh between *certainly be* and *muſt be.* They who object this to me muſt define, that I may ſee the difference. Now if all the Liberty we

 have,

have, conſiſts in a Power to do or forbear ſeveral Actions, according to the Determinations of our Mind, and that *Liberty* is perfectly conſiſtent with that certainty of our Actions before they are produc'd, then our Liberty is reconcilable with the Divine Preſcience, ſince all the difficulty lay in reconciling the certainty of all future Actions with our Liberty. Nay, I have ſhown there can be no Liberty but what ſuppoſes the certainty and neceſſity of all Events. True Liberty therefore is conſiſtent with Neceſſity, and ought not to be oppos'd to it, but only to Compulſion.

2. The next difficulty is concerning *Eternity*; upon which the late Reverend Biſhop of *Worceſter*, Dr. *Stillingfleet*, argues thus: *We know*, ſays he, *that either God muſt have been for ever, or it is impoſſible he ſhould ever be; for if he ſhould come into being when he was not, he muſt have ſome Cauſe of his being, and what was the firſt Cauſe would be God; but if he was for ever, he was from himſelf: And what Notion or Conception can we have in our Minds concerning it? Let Men try their Imaginations about God's Eternity, not meerly how he ſhould be from himſelf, but how God ſhould co-exiſt with all the differences of time, and yet there be no Succeſſion in his own being; for where there is Succeſſion, there is a paſſing out of not being in ſuch a duration into being in it; which is not conſiſtent with the abſolute*

In his Sermon of Myſterys, p. 17.

P. 18.

abſolute Perfection of the Divine Nature. And therefore God muſt be all at once what he is, without any reſpect to the difference of time paſt, preſent, or to come; from whence Eternity was defin'd by Boethius, *to be a perfect and compleat Poſſeſſion, all at once, of Everlaſting Life. But how can we form any Conception in our Minds of that being all at once, which hath ſuch different Acts, as muſt be meaſur'd by a long Succeſſion of time, as the creating and diſſolving the Frame of the World, the promiſing and ſending the Meſſias, the declaring and executing a General Judgment? How can theſe things be conſiſtent with a permanent, or a continuance of being, without ſuch Succeſſion?* De Conſol. l. 3.

The Inconſiſtencys charg'd on the Attribute of Eternity, are on the Conſequences of our Idea of it. Now his Lordſhip ought to have defin'd what he meant by the word *Eternity*, that it might have more plainly appear'd whether his Lordſhip's Inferences are juſt: but ſince he has not, I ſhall define it, in order to ſhow, that no abſurdity, nothing inconſiſtent with the Divine Perfections, or any other parts of our Knowledg, follows from it. By Eternity I underſtand, an Idea of *Duration, to which it is repugnant to aſſign a Beginning or End.* His Lordſhip's firſt Objection to the Notion of *Eternity*, as apply'd to God, is, *That if he was for ever, he muſt be from himſelf; but*

what Notion or Conception can we have in our Minds concerning it? This Objection, as I conceive, is directed againſt that part of our Idea of *Eternity*, which is call'd *Eternity a parte ante:* and I agree, in caſe the inference, that *God was from himſelf*, is juſtly drawn from *God's being for ever*, that we could not frame any conſiſtent Notion or Conception concerning God's *Eternity*. But I think the quite contrary follows from *God's being for ever*, that if he was for ever, he was of none, or unoriginated: to ſay he was for ever, and from himſelf, is to ſay he was for ever, and was not for ever. Beſides, the Expreſſion of *from himſelf*, amounts, if I underſtand it, to this, that a Being was before it was; for I cannot underſtand how a Being can be *from himſelf*, but by giving it ſelf a Being. If by *from himſelf*, be underſtood Self-exiſtent, without a cauſe of his Being, or Independent; then I grant the Inference to be true, That if God was for ever, he was from himſelf; that is, if he was for ever, he was without a cauſe of his Being, or Self-exiſtent. But what difficulty there is in that *Notion* or *Conception*, I underſtand not; the difficulty ſeems to me to lie on the other ſide, how God ſhould have a Cauſe of his Being, and yet have exiſted from Eternity: for by Exiſtence from Eternity, I conceive ſuch an Exiſtence as we cannot conceive not to have

have exiſted; and I take it to be repugnant in it ſelf to ſuppoſe every thing had a beginning, and much more ſo to ſuppoſe what had no beginning had a beginning.

The next Abſurdity his Lordſhip charges on the Attribute of Eternity, is, *How God ſhould co-exiſt with all the Differences of time, and yet there be no Succeſſion in his Being?* This I own to be as abſurd as *God's exiſting from himſelf*, and that there is a manifeſt Contradiction in this Notion or Conception; for if *by Succeſſion in God's Being* is underſtood (and I know not what other ſenſe to put upon it) co-exiſting with all the Differences of time, then his Lordſhip's Difficulty is how to conceive God to co-exiſt with all the Parts of time, and yet not to co-exiſt with all the Differences of time. Now I acknowledg I cannot do this; but in behalf of God's Eternity I beg leave to plead, that if God does co-exiſt with the Differences of time, then he does co-exiſt with the Differences of time; and it by no means can be ſaid, that he does not co-exiſt with all the Differences of time, if it be true that he does co-exiſt with all the Differences of time.

But he ſays, *It is not conſiſtent with the abſolute Perfection of the Divine Nature, that there ſhould be a Succeſſion in God, or* a Coexiſtence with all the Differences of time; *becauſe where there is Succeſſion, there is a paſſing out of not being in ſuch a Duration into being in it:* which is to ſay, That it is not conſiſtent with the perfection of the Divine Nature that it ſhould co-exiſt with all the Differences of time; becauſe where there is a Co-exiſtence with all the Differences of time, there is a Co-exiſtence with all the Differences of time; or, which is the ſame thing, *A paſſing out of not being in ſuch a Duration into being in it.* All the Argument comes

comes to this, It is not becauſe it is not. Co-exiſtence with all the Differences of time is not a Perfection, becauſe Co-exiſtence with all the Differences of time is not a Perfection.

The Biſhop goes on: *And therefore*, ſays he, *God muſt be all at once what he is, without any reſpect to the Difference of time paſt, preſent, or to come*; that is, if it be an Imperfection in God to co-exiſt with all the Differences of time, and conſequently a falſe Notion of Eternity, it follows, that *God muſt be all at once*, &c. that is, he muſt always actually exiſt in paſt, preſent and future Duration. Now I deny that conſequence; for if both the Notions or Ideas of Eternity are either repugnant to God's Perfections, or conſiſt of repugnant Ideas, it follows that we have no Idea to the word *Eternity*, and that we mean nothing when we uſe the word *Eternity*. For to attribute Eternity to God in the firſt ſenſe of that word is impoſſible, according to his Lordſhip; becauſe Perfection and Imperfection cannot be put together: and to attribute Eternity to God in the latter ſenſe, is to put together inconſiſtent Ideas, and to confound the Differences between *is and is not*, which in reality Men cannot do: for to ſay *God exiſts all at once*, &c. is to ſay that he actually exiſts in time paſt, preſent, and to come; that is, that time paſt is not paſt, and that time to come is come, and was always come. But to give ſome ſatisfaction to thoſe who think it an Imperfection for God to co-exiſt with the ſeveral parts of time, I deſire it may be conſider'd, That if God operates at different times, and takes up the ſpace of ſix days in the Creation of the World, redeems Mankind 4000 Years after, and will judg Men in a time not yet come, then he operates not all at once; and if he operates not all at once, then he exiſts not

all

all at once: for if he exiſted all at once, there could be no Diſtinction of time in his Operations. Paſt, preſent, and to come muſt be attributed to the Being that operates, as well as to its Operations; becauſe Operations at different times ſuppoſe Succeſſion in the nature of things, and exiſting all at once ſuppoſes no Succeſſion; and conſequently if there is a Succeſſion in the nature of things, there is no ſuch thing in nature as exiſting all at once. Now if there is no Imperfection in ſuppoſing that God acts at different times, as there is not, what Imperfection can there be in ſuppoſing that he does not exiſt now at the time of the general Judgment, any more than that he is not now judging the World?

'Tis urg'd by many learned Men, that there is a Contradiction to make our Idea of Eternity conſiſt in Succeſſion to which it is repugnant to aſſign a beginning or end; and thus they argue, *That if there has been a Succeſſion of an infinite number of Years, and an infinite number of Days, and an infinite number of Hours, and an infinite number of Minutes, and that Infinites are equal; then it muſt follow that the number of Years is equal to the number of Days, Hours and Minutes, which is abſurd.* To this I anſwer, the Idea we have of Eternity is of a Succeſſion of time, to which it is repugnant to aſſign a beginning or end. Now to compare two Infinites, ſuppoſes two poſitive determinate Numbers; for unleſs they are ſo, they cannot be compar'd in the ſenſe of the Objection. Now it is a jeſt to talk of which is moſt in things that cannot be number'd, as Infinites are ſuppos'd to be.

2. The term *Eternity* ſtands for one Idea; our Idea therefore muſt be the ſame, when that term is apply'd to Years, Days, Hours; and conſe-

conſequently they are all equally infinite or unmeaſurable: and what abſurdity there lies in ſuppoſing things equally unmeaſurable, I ſhall only know when I am ſhown that any Infinite can be meaſurable.

3. This Equality, which is the only Equality that can be meant with good ſenſe, whenever the word *Eternity* or *Infinity*, as apply'd to time, is us'd, *that conſiſts in being unmeaſurable*, ſhows plainly that the Queſtion of which is moſt in two Infinites is impertinent, becauſe *moſt* can never have room or place but in determinate Numbers. When two different Numbers, Nine and Eleven, are affirm'd to be equally odd Numbers, would it not be abſurd for any one to ſay they are not equally odd, becauſe one is more than another? whereas the Equality lies in the oddneſs, as in the other Caſe the Equality lies in the unmeaſurableneſs, or being equally unmeaſurable: and therefore nothing can be more abſurd than to ask which is moſt of things that cannot be counted; Number can only meaſure a fix'd, a determin'd Succeſſion.

Thus I have drawn up my Thoughts on a nice Subject, in as little compaſs and as clear a light as I was able, without the mixture of any Art or popular Expreſſions to affect the Paſſions of the Reader, and hinder him from diſcerning the want of Connexion in any part of my Diſcourſe; and ſhall be heartily glad if by this my *Eſſay* I ſhall provoke any one, that ſees thro my Miſtakes, to ſet me right in a matter of ſo great conſequence as the Subject of it; or, if it be thought that I have truly and juſtly ſtated the matter, one more able to do juſtice to the Argument than I am, to handle it in a more extenſive manner.

FINIS.